The Bare-Bones Instructions to "Mindfulness of Breathing"

Taken from the Anapanasati Sutta #118 in the Majjhima Nikaya

"The gift of dhamma excels all other gifts"

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Introduction

This booklet is written to beginner meditators as well as for those who are more practiced in meditation. The author is taking the instructions given in the oldest of the original discourses [suttas] still in existence today. They may seem a little different from other instructions that you have been given or read in the past. But, rest assured, these instructions are what the Buddha taught over 2500 years ago.

These instructions include 'The Four Foundations of Mindfulness' (in Pali this is called Satipatthana), that is Mindfulness of the Body, Mindfulness of Feeling, Mindfulness of Mind, and Mindfulness of Dhammas. By practicing these meditation instructions given by the Buddha in this sutta, the meditator will naturally experience the meditation stages called Jhana (This is a Pali word that means a level or stage of meditation).

According to the original teaches of the Buddha, the 'Four Foundations of Mindfulness' and 'The Mindfulness of Breathing' suttas are intimately intertwined and dependent on each other. So, when the meditator practices in this way, can then gain the insight, wisdom, tranquility and equanimity needed to experience the ultimate goal of awakening called, Nibbana.

What is meditation?

Meditation is one of those kinds of words that we all hear and it seems to have different meanings for different people. When asked, some people may practice meditation but, they can't explain exactly what it is they do. So here is a definition of meditation that agrees with the Buddha's instructions.

Meditation is the skill in watching "how" mind moves. By this I mean, when mind is very happy, peaceful and calm then all of a sudden something happens and mind becomes sad, or anxious, or angry, "How" did that happen? "How" did mind move from the happiness, peacefulness and calm to

becoming sad, anxious or angry? Meditation is being able to watch how this happens, and then "how" to let go, without getting sad, anxious, or angry. Meditation is the art of observation and relaxing.

Commentaries

The instructions given here may seem different from what may be taught elsewhere. The reason is that over the years many scholars have written about meditation. These writings are called commentaries.

These commentaries are often written by people who have never practiced meditation, but have studied exclusively. They didn't write about their own direct experiential knowledge from practicing meditation, but would talk to people who practiced many different types of meditation and copied what was reported to them. These commentaries may have been very convincing to the scholars, but when anyone compares them against what is taught in the original texts, they can see a very big difference in the instructions.

Sometimes the commentaries completely leave out whole sections of the instructions and sometimes they just go out on their own and add what another style of meditation they think works, then gives them as the proper instructions, as if they were given from the Buddha.

Please understand that all styles of meditation are of real benefit to anyone who practices regularly. But consider that just like looking at a map, all roads don't lead to the same place. (there are many different roads that may be taken, but they may not get to the desired destination.) In the same way, when we go back to the discourses given by the Buddha there is a map that leads directly to the cessation of all suffering, when we follow it closely.

This is the reason that the author has taken the time and energy to go back to the original discourses [suttas] to understand and practice meditation in the way that was originally taught. Which was painstakingly researched by direct experience and studied for many, many years.

Psychotherapy and Buddhist Meditation

Western psychology and psychotherapy differs from Buddhist meditation and awareness in very subtle but obvious ways. This is not to say that western psychology and psychotherapy are wrong and Buddhist meditation is right.

They both have their advantages and uses but the end results are quite different. The roads on the map are different and lead to different results. Western psychology and psychotherapy takes a person suffering from mental imbalances and shows them how to live in a more balanced way. Buddhist meditation takes a mentally balanced person and shows them how to be fully awake, truly happy and free from all suffering.

Psychology and psychotherapy deals entirely with thoughts and feelings, then spends time analyzing them. The therapist helps the client to get involved with the identification and content of the feelings or emotions. This is when the psychologist talks about making the "ego" healthy.

Whereas, in Buddhism we learn to see how the experiences we have are nothing more than an ever-changing "process" (called dependent origination). We learn that getting involved with these thoughts and feelings personally, or taking them to be "me or mine", is the cause of great unhappiness and suffering. The ultimate goal of the Buddha's teachings is to show us how to let go of any ideas about there being a permanent "self or ego" that controls everything. The Buddhist meditator learns to see all things in life as being simply part of a "process" (dependent origination) that is ever-changing (anicca), painful (dukkha) and impersonal (anatta).

Why versus How

The goals of western psychology and psychotherapy and Buddhist meditation work at solving the human conditions of suffering, but they are quite unique and have extremely different end results. They both teach a person to become more aware of thoughts and feelings, but as you can see their perspectives are quite different.

In other words, western psychology and psychotherapy places its focus on observing past experiences and analyzes these experiences to find out "WHY" it occurred. Then it shows a person how to live a healthy life by dealing with these past occurrences. The therapist helps to teach an unbalanced person to experience life in a more balanced or regular way. Buddhism, on the other hand, puts its focus on observing experience and seeing "how" the whole process of experience occurs through seeing dependent origination and teaches us to understand that it is an impersonal evolution. The key to Buddhist teachings deals with "HOW" this process works. Whereas, western

psychology deals with "why" these things come up. Which is dealing mostly with concepts and the reasons for their appearing.

Buddhism shows how to develop our mind with pure, coherent awareness and observation of every process (experience) as it arises and teaches us to understand how to see more clearly. This is dealing directly with the reality of observing exactly "how" things arise in the present moment. So the Buddha's teachings are seen only as an impersonal process and not to falsely identify with or get overly involved with this process by thinking about it. The Buddha teaches us to see this whole experience and let go, relax, then gently re-direct our attention back to the breath and relaxing, without getting involved with and wrongly identifying with the content of those thoughts and feelings. Or we could say, we learn to see everything as an impersonal experience to be seen, not to get involved with or take this process as being a personal self or ego.

These two different types of perspective have different goals and objectives. Their separate approaches can bring happiness and balance into our life. The Buddhist approach tends to go beyond ordinary types of awareness and it leads us to see how to let go of all ego-identification so we can truly see and experience the ultimate goal, which is the complete cessation of all suffering.

When a person takes the time and energy to practice meditation in this way, they will begin to see and understand for themselves just why the Buddha's path is such an amazing way of experiencing the world around them. The Buddha proclaimed that "We are the Happy One's" . Doing the meditation that is written in this booklet, you will see why for yourself.

Anapanasati Sutta

The actual instructions given in the discourse called "The Anapanasati Sutta" are only one paragraph long but the explanation will take a bit more space. These instructions are word for word, letter for letter repeated in other discourses [suttas] as well. For example, they are in the "The Four Foundations of Mindfulness" [Satipatthana Sutta] and the "Mindfulness of the Body" [Kayagatasati Sutta] discourses as well, to name just a couple.

As you read these instructions and give them a try, you will begin to see and understand how mind works, which is a very exciting and fun experience. Also, if you have practiced other styles of meditation, you will notice that

things like headaches, vertigo, or ringing in the ears, won't occur anymore. This meditation practice is not only about sitting as still as a statue and doing a quiet type of meditation but it is very helpful in all daily activities that we have to do during our everyday lives.

Please follow these instructions as closely as possible for the best results and progress. Also, it is best to do only one meditation at a time, because mind is fickle and will jump around when there are different types of meditation being practiced at the same time. It can become confusing as to which meditation to practice then the meditator tries doing one type and when it doesn't seem right the meditator jumps to another type of meditation, as a result, they wind up not doing any real meditation at all.

So, please prepare yourself for a very pleasant journey to the cessation of suffering.

Maha-Metta always, From

Bhante Vimalaramsi

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Meditation Instructions

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa

There will be some Pali words introduced into this instruction and the author will try to make these words understandable in English for the readers.

This discourse is taken from the "Anapanasati Sutta", 'Anapana' is a Pali word meaning in breathing and out breathing. 'Sati' means mindfulness, watchfulness or observation power. So, the meaning of "anapanasati" means watchfulness of the in breathing and out breathing. The Pali word "Sutta" means 'thread'. So whenever we see the word 'sutta' it is another thread that is woven with other 'suttas' and together they make a very beautiful cloth of 'Dhamma' [many people use the Sanskrit word 'Dharma', instead. they have exactly the same meaning but the author prefers to use the Pali pronunciation] 'Dhamma' is another Pali word that has many different meanings some of which are truth, the way things are, the Buddha's teachings, the true nature of things, etc.

This sutta [thread] is taken from the "The Anapanasati Sutta" and will be given in bold letters and underlined. There will be an explanation given in regular type after each section.

16] "And how, monks, is mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?

17] "Here a monk, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and establishes mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.

These are the preparatory stages of the meditation. It basically means for the meditator to find a quiet place to sit with little or no distractions. Turn off the TV, radio or telephone and find a place that has very few noises which will pull you away from the sitting. For the beginning meditator noises can turn into a big distraction and can pull one's attention away from watching the breath and relaxing. After the meditator becomes more familiar with this practice, noises won't really be a bother anymore. They just become a part of the meditation practice.

The next part says to sit with the legs folded crosswise. But the author has found that many people in this country are not used to sitting on the floor with their legs crossed. When they try, it can cause a lot of pain to arise. The meditator can sit on a cushion or if they prefer they can sit on a chair [as long as they don't lean into the back rest]. Some meditation teachers want their students to sit in what is called a "full or half lotus" position, but it really isn't necessary. There is no magic in sitting on the floor and twisting the legs into a pretzel. A comfortable sitting posture where the legs don't go to sleep is best.

The reason that the Buddha recommended sitting on the floor is at the time he was alive they didn't use chairs, so everyone sat on the floor and they were used to it. But, in our culture, we hardly ever sit on the floor, so our bodies are not used to it. Also, it may take quite a long time to become used to sitting on the floor in a comfortable way. It can even be a painful experience for a long time before the legs get limber enough to be comfortable.

It is the meditator's choice whether they sit on the floor or not. When sitting in meditation it is best to sit with the back nicely straight, with one vertebrae stacked on the other. Please don't sit in a rigid way where the back is overly straight as this can cause unnecessary pain and back problems to arise. Contrary to what many people think, pain is not the point of the meditation and nothing is further from the truth. Watching mind move and seeing how it goes from one thing to another is what meditation is all about. Please sit with the legs in a comfortable position and have the back nicely straight.

Now is when the actual instructions begin.

> ***18] "Breathing in long, he understands: 'I breathe in long'; or breathing out long, he understands: 'I breathe out long': Breathing in short, he understands: 'I breathe in short'; breathing out short, he understands: 'I breathe out short'.***

The key words here are "He understands", it doesn't say anything about placing your attention on the nostril tip or the abdomen. The instructions don't say to count the breaths, nor do they say anything about following the breath around in the body from the nostril tip to the throat to the lungs to the abdomen and back again. The instructions simply say to "understand" what the breath is doing in the present moment, They never mention focusing one's attention in any one place. All that these instructions say is the "He/she understands when they breathe in and out long or short. So where does one put their attention? The answer is 'One Understands' when breath is long or short, they understand when breath is fine or coarse, they understand when breath is fast or slow. In other words the meditator knows what the breath is doing in the present moment. The meditator doesn't need to focus on any one place or follow it from one place to another. They only have to understand the general characteristics of what the breath is doing. Let us continue on:

> ***He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body'; He trains thus: 'I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body. He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in tranquilizing the bodily formation': he trains thus: 'I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation'.***

Now, we get to the part where the real instructions abide. When the instructions says 'He trains thus' the meditator begins to train their mind to become more observant, so they see their whole physical body on the in breath and out breath. The meditator NEVER tries to control their breath in any way! They just let body breathe naturally. They notice where body has tightness or tension in it. On the in breath notice when there is tightness in the muscle of the shoulders or back or hands, etc. And do the same on the out breath.

This, is the most important part of the meditation and that is to relax those tight muscles consciously and do this on the in breath and the out breath.

An interesting observation about the people in this country is, that they think the whole body starts at the neck then goes down, while from the neck up is a part of mind. This is a wrong perception that needs to be addressed. The whole body starts at the top of the head and goes down from there.

When noticing any tightness or tension, the first place that needs to be observed is in the head. Every thought, every movement of mind begins with a subtle tightness or tension arising in the head. Meditators need to be aware of this and relax on the in breath and relax on the out breath. The meditator uses the breath as a reminder to relax.

Smiling

Once the meditator begins to meditate, first softly close the eyes, then put a little smile in the mind, a little smile in the eyes, even though the eyes are closed, put a little smile on the lips and a smile in the heart.

Having a smile is a very important part of the meditation! There have been some studies done on the corners of the mouth. When the corners of the mouth go down, mind has a tendency to be heavy, rigid and unhappy. So at that time, mind tends to be sluggish and can become stiff and it moves very slowly. But when the corners of the mouth go up mind tends to be happy and have uplifting thoughts. Then mind tends to be lighter and more fluid in watching. Joy is one of the enlightenment factors and smiling leads the meditator to this joy. Just look at a good Buddha image and see the smile. The artist is showing us that this should be a joyful experience. This is definitely a smiling meditation!

On the in-breath, relax the tightness in the body [especially the head]... smile. On the out-breath... relax... smile... in-breath... relax... smile... out-breath... relax.. smile. When relaxing feel mind kind of open up and expand, like a hand does when it opens up after it was holding onto something, then, at that time, mind becomes very calm and clear. It is like mind takes a tiny step down from where it was. This open calm mind has no thoughts in it, there is only a pure awareness, that is exceptionally alert and bright. The meditator stays with the breath and relaxing as much as possible, without grabbing onto or trying to control anything. Just observe, and relax. This is the simplest and most fun meditation to practice, that the author has ever seen or experienced.

Arising thoughts

Many people think that when they are "meditating", mind is not "supposed" to have thoughts in it. But this is not the case. Especially at the beginning mind will run all over the place and think about this and think about that. "AND" that is alright!

Thoughts are not the enemy to push down, stop or fight with. Thoughts are just thoughts, so the meditator treats them simply as a small distraction and when the meditator notices that mind is thinking about this or that, they just let go of those thoughts, even if mind thinks that these thoughts are "important". Let them go , relax the subtle tightness caused by the thoughts and softly redirect the attention back to the breath and relaxing again.

At first the meditator may not notice that mind has gone away for a long time, but as soon as they have noticed they let go, relax and redirect mind back to the meditation object (the breath, relaxing and smiling). There is no need to criticize or condemn oneself, at all. This is a part of training one's awareness and it can be a fun part of the meditation when not taken too seriously. It is alright to have fun and make the meditation a part of a game. Smile!

Body movement

When the meditator begins to sit they must not move any part of there body at all. Please don't wiggle the fingers or toes, don't sway the body, don't scratch, don't shift the body, don't rub, don't change your posture, for any reason. Please sit as still as a Buddha image or big rock that is stuck in the ground. You can move as much as they do.

When sitting like this there may be some sensations that arise, like an itch, a tickle in the throat, a sneeze, heat, vibration, or even pain. Please remember that you can't move at all! So what to do? First, notice that the impulse to make the sensation go away is very strong and your mind will begin to think about it. These thoughts sound something like this, "I wish that this would stop!", "I hate this feeling", "Why doesn't this just go away and stop bothering me!", "I want this to leave me alone!", "But the instructions say that I can't move!", or "Oh, what torture!".

The first thing that the meditator will observe is the thoughts about

the sensation. The meditator will see that the more one tries to control the sensation with their thoughts, the bigger and more intense that sensation becomes. The instructions tell us, to let go of the thoughts and then to notice that there is a subtle tightness in the head and in one's mind, so then relax.

Next the meditator will notice that there is a tight mental fist wrapped around that sensation, one lets the sensation be there without any resistance at all. The truth [dhamma] of the present moment is, when a sensation arises, 'It is there'! If the meditator tries to fight that sensation, or they try to control that sensation in any way, or they try to make that sensation go away, as a result, it gets bigger and more intense.

Allowing sensations to be

The meditator learns through this training of themselves, to allow that sensation to be there. One learns to open up that tight mental fist and allow the sensation to be and do whatever it wants to do. It is only a sensation and it is alright for that sensation to be there. It has to be alright, why? Because that is the truth! Anytime one tries to fight with the truth or control the truth or make the truth be they way they want it to be, it causes more and more suffering.

The meditator simply allows the sensation to be there and to float like a bubble floating in the wind. When the wind blows from one direction the bubble goes in the same direction and when the wind changes and blows in another direction the bubble goes in that direction. The bubble has no resistance at all it just floats around wherever it will. So in the same way, the meditator allows the sensation to float wherever it will. This meditation is about watching the movements of mind.

Meditation is learning how to lovingly accept whatever it is that arises in the present moment and allow it to be there without any resistance at all. Now, the meditator notices a kind of subtle and sometimes not so subtle tightness or tension in their body, especially in the head, relax and smile. Now they feel mind relax and kind of expand then open up and next mind seems to take a little step down and it becomes calm.

At that time, mind becomes very clear and alert, there are no thoughts in mind so it becomes pure. Now the meditator will please redirect their attention back to the breath, relax and smile again. Of course, the nature

of these kinds of sensations is that they don't go away right away. So mind may get pulled back to that sensation again and the meditator does the same thing again. No matter how many times mind gets pulled away, the process is always the same. First let go of the thought... relax... smile, next let go of that tight mental fist wrapped around that sensation... relax... smile... softly redirect mind back to the breath, relaxing and smile...

Conclusion

These are the bare-bones instructions for the Mindfulness of Breathing. These instructions when followed closely will work for every type of distraction that takes mind away from being in the present moment, relaxing and smiling. One thing to remember is that this is an all of the time meditation. When a person is walking from their house to the car or the car to their work place, what is their mind doing at that time? Thinking about this or that, liking this, disliking that and so on. This is the time to recognize that mind is wandering around and let go of the thoughts, relax, smile and redirect their attention back to the breath, relaxing and smiling again. Do this as many times during the day as can be remembered. This is how one practices the meditation all of the time.

May this booklet be of some assistance to all who are searching the path of awakening. May all beings be successful in attaining Nibbana quickly and easily, in this lifetime. The author shares the merit of writing this booklet with his mother, father and all beings. It is customary after reading or sharing Dhamma with some else to Share Merit with all beings. So:

May suffering ones, be suffering free
And the fear-struck,fearless be
May the grieving shed all grief
And may all beings find relief.

May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.

May beings inhabiting space and earth
Devas and nagas of mighty power
Share this merit of ours.

May they long protect the Lord Buddha's dispensation.

Sadhu ... Sadhu... Sadhu...